

Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” Words from our Gospel today from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Certainly, there things that the human race needs to survive, and ideally such necessities of food, water, shelter, healthcare, and the like would be widely available; yet as we know, there are many people in our world who perish every day because they are unfortunately lacking the basic necessities to survive, often due to circumstances beyond their control. Jesus knows how important these are, and so much of his ministry on earth was indeed spent tending to the very real needs of his flock. The Scriptures are full of miraculous stories and uplifting encounters with the Son of God. As a good shepherd, Jesus went around to towns and villages healing and feeding God’s people, finding those who were lost or rescuing the downtrodden from oppression. So there is something divine in every act of outreach towards our fellow human beings in making sure that their needs are being met. On that note, a well-deserved shout out once again, goes to all those folks who are, in their own humble way, doing their part (who have always done their part) to care for the world. From the health care workers and first responders to the cashiers and stockers at the grocery store, from the mail carriers to the internet service providers: you are participating in the vital ministry of Jesus Christ himself. You are tending to the needs of God’s flock, keeping all of us going. I hope you can appreciate that and appreciate the vocation that God has put before you. We certainly do, and though we take it for granted at times, you have always been there for us. Thank you for being a Christ figure, sharing in this unique and personal way the compassionate, self-sacrificing love of God with your fellow human beings through your own vocation and life’s work. Thank you.

But our readings point out for us today that Christians are not in the business of merely surviving. Christians are in the business of living life to the full. Jesus is not content for us merely to live but he wants us to thrive. Jesus came so as to bring abundant life. Even in the gravest of circumstances, when things are not ideal, whether that’s systematic violence and oppression, or knowing great poverty, or facing health pandemics such as the one we are currently experiencing, there is still abundant life to be had. This is something that history has shown us time and time again. This is something our third-world brothers and sisters can teach us. This is what Jesus offers to us in the grace of the resurrection. God always comes bringing a more abundant life. Last week, we heard the Gospel story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. After encountering the risen Christ, they immediately shared with others how their hearts were burning within them as Jesus opened the Scriptures and how Jesus made himself known in the breaking of the bread. Theirs is not the only story of new life. Fr. Greg shared the story of the Covid-19 patient who encountered Christ in the hospital janitor, and Fr. Greg went on to invite the parish to share some stories of finding abundant life even in the midst of this crisis. I would like to share some of these Emmaus stories with you now.

One of the online stories states, “I offered some decorations on let go for free. A lady wanted to pick them up, [telling me that she] was providing them for habitat for humanity. An example of people always thinking of others even during these tough times.” [...] We receive several cards at the Rectory. Now, I don’t save much, but I do still have most all the notes I’ve received. Call me sentimental, but there is abundant life being shared in these cards. Here’s a few recent snippets: ~*READ FROM ACTUAL CARDS HERE*~ [...] I’m super impressed by our school where the students and teachers continue to apply themselves to learning in spite of new challenges. Our Kindergarten buddies have been sending cute check-ins to their classmates through their teachers. Our 5th graders put on a virtual wax museum from their homes, showcasing their research into influential people. Teachers have put out inspiring videos and how-to demonstrations, for example in art and music. Our Home School Guild just had a virtual trivia night amongst our school families, and on Friday our 8th grade students received their hope ribbons as a celebration of their achievements as well as our collective hope for the future which our school represents. On our school’s website and Facebook page you can check it out and witness this abundant life for yourself. One of our parents after having picked up their schoolwork for their child posted, “I almost cried seeing all the teachers and faculty wishing everyone well. I am so grateful for all their hard work!” Another parent replied, “I agree, it was very emotional. So grateful for the entire Queen of heaven staff for their positivity and support.” It’s not easy for any of our students, faculty, or parents, but they’ve been nothing but supportive. Our kids are more resilient than we give them credit for. I’m proud of you. Thanks for showing us abundant life. [...] I have to say, I love the comments folks are posting on Facebook during Mass. Normally, we wouldn’t be using our phones or texting during Church, right? But folks have been putting into the live-time group chats: “it’s good to be here with everybody. Peace be with you. Thank you Queen of Heaven. Looking forward to seeing everyone again next time.” Perhaps, you always went to the 4:00pm or 9:30am Mass or are guest visitor to our parish – now you can reach out and put a name and a face to a fellow parishioner in our Queen of Heaven Family and continue to be the welcoming presence you have always been to each other. Abundant life is being shared here.

This homily has largely been crafted by you, and there are many more stories, all of which are real life examples in our very own community of the abundant life Jesus has come to bring. Hearing this Good News, we can confidently say with the Psalmist, “The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.” Yes, sometimes, it’s hard to recognize the risen Christ in our midst, but it’s never too late to find this new life for yourself also. St. Peter tells us this much in our first reading informing us that we can repent, that is turn around and open ourselves up to this newness. We still can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and abundant life is indeed promised to us all. So take refuge in our faith that the Lord knows us and is with us as a good shepherd, helping us not merely to get through this life but to live it well. May you come to know always the abundant life Jesus offers in this great season of resurrection and Easter joy.

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/050320.cfm>

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Lectionary: 49

Reading 1 **ACTS 2:14A, 36-41**

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven,
raised his voice, and proclaimed:
“Let the whole house of Israel know for certain
that God has made both Lord and Christ,
this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart,
and they asked Peter and the other apostles,
“What are we to do, my brothers?”
Peter said to them,
“Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
For the promise is made to you and to your children
and to all those far off,
whomever the Lord our God will call.”
He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them,
“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”
Those who accepted his message were baptized,
and about three thousand persons were added that day.

Responsorial Psalm 23: 1-3A, 3B4, 5, 6

R. (1) **The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

R. **The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side.
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. **The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. **The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 21 PT 2:20B-25

Beloved:

If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good,
this is a grace before God.
For to this you have been called,
because Christ also suffered for you,
leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.
He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When he was insulted, he returned no insult;
when he suffered, he did not threaten;
instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.
He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross,
so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness.
By his wounds you have been healed.
For you had gone astray like sheep,
but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Alleluia JN 10:14

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my sheep, and mine know me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel JN 10:1-10

Jesus said:

“Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate
but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber.
But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.
The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice,
as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
When he has driven out all his own,
he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him,
because they recognize his voice.
But they will not follow a stranger;
they will run away from him,
because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”
Although Jesus used this figure of speech,
the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you,
I am the gate for the sheep.
All who came before me are thieves and robbers,

but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate.

Whoever enters through me will be saved,
and will come in and go out and find pasture.

A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy;

I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”